

The Tower 99

Chapter 99

Lee Shin's thunderbolts had turned the grass and the trees in the area into ash. One could see pools of blood and viscera all around, to say nothing of the soldiers' corpses strewn everywhere.

Swish—! Thump!

The Blade of Wind sliced through the last knight's neck and vanished.

[You have defeated the knight Reim of Aman.]

[Your merit points have increased by 1,500.]

[You have used 50,000 merit points.]

[You have acquired the 『Orange Pattern』.]

[Orange Pattern]

You have received the qualification to enter the Orange Zone.

Your Health and Mana points increase by 6%.

Your overall stats increase by 10%.

The red light on Lee Shin's hand faded, replaced by an orange glow. Lee Shin had acquired the next pattern even faster than he had expected.

‘At this rate, I will soon have the Yellow Pattern.’

Merteng was the ultimate place for growth. With endless opportunities to fight enemy soldiers and earn merit points, any challenger with ability could thrive. For Lee Shin, it was the perfect situation.

‘On the other hand, the enemies will have less room for growth because of me.’

Merteng could take on multiple countries together, but most countries could only fight against one country—Merteng. And then they also had to divide the rewards among themselves.

Furthermore, catching demons to earn merit points wasn’t easy, as the US and China occupied the most demon territories starting from the Navy Zone. Consequently, the other countries grew slowly.

Lee Shin grabbed the neck of the qualified person with the Purple Pattern on the cold ground. Why was such a skilled person wasting his talents in this desolate Demon Realm?

Most qualified people with the Purple Pattern were either facing demons on the front lines or waiting to deter the United States and China. It did not seem like this guy’s goal was to invade Merteng by breaking through the Demon Realm.

"Was your goal to catch soldiers from other countries?" Lee Shin asked.

"Kuk... yeah... My goal was to weaken the forces of Tetir and Wildes and grow stronger. But I guess it’s all meaningless now," the challenger replied.

"Well, I can tell how much trust there is between alliances," Lee Shin said.

Lee Shin twisted the challenger’s neck and threw him away. Apart from Merteng, the WOFP alliance was also in a precarious situation, as it could dissolve anytime.

"Kanoko, how far have we come?" Lee Shin asked Kanoko.

"I think we've come about halfway," Kanoko replied, looking at Lee Shin.

Lee Shin remembered that Kim Kang-Chun and Ji Eun-Ju were trapped in Tetir.

‘I'm on my way to save you, so please don't die.’

“Keuk...?keukk...” Kim Kang-Chun was out of breath.

Thump!

Kim Kang-Chun looked battered and was thrown into prison.

"Oppa!" Ji Eun-Ju cried out.

Ji Eun-Ju was also inside the prison, so she hurriedly supported Kim Kang-Chun and looked after him. He was covered with rough wounds and burn marks. How much torture had he endured?

Ji Eun-Ju could hear him breathing faintly, but she couldn't see a single muscle on his body even twitching. She was also a mess, but her condition wasn't as bad as Kim Kang-Chun's.

"Sob..."

Ji Eun-Ju knew that she could not have endured the torture that Kim Kang-Chun had suffered. Therefore, she had passed on most of the information she knew, ensuring she wouldn't be harmed.

"Oppa, you'll die if we don't do anything," said Ji Eun-Ju looking at Kim Kang-Chun with worry.

Tetir had asked Ji Eun-Ju and Kim Kang-Chun to join their country as refugees.

Ji Eun-Ju had thought about it to escape this hellish situation, but she could not do it because of Kim Kang-Chun's vehement refusal.

Every day was full of tears for Ji Eun-Ju. She could not think of a way out of this situation, so she spent every day in fear and terror.

‘Maybe it'll be easier if I just die.’

Ji Eun-Ju kept having extreme thoughts, but she did not dare to act on them, so spending the day crying had become her routine.

“Sob...” Ji Eun-Ju started crying.

Thud. Thud.

She looked at the unconscious Kim Kang-Chun as tears welled in her eyes. She heard the sound of approaching footsteps of a guard and lifted her head. The guard came, opened the door, and helped the two of them up.

"Follow me," ordered the guard.

Supporting Kim Kang-Chun, Ji Eun-Ju followed the guard to a mobile prison and went inside it.

"Where are we going?" Ji Eun-Ju asked.

"We're going to Narden," the guard replied.

"What?" Ji Eun-Ju was shocked.

Ji Eun-Ju looked at the knight with surprise. The other knights laughed, finding her reaction hilarious. A challenger left the group of knights, approached their prison cell, and grabbed one of the iron bars.

"I'll use the information you gave me well. And in return, I will spare your life. But... not the life of your friends, okay?" said the challenger with a smirk.

It seemed like the challenger wasn't entirely sane. Then he shifted his gaze to Kim Kang-Chun on the floor.

"The same goes for him," said the challenger.

Again, his unfocused pupils turned to Ji Eun-Ju.

"And I won't be sparing the lives of those who would come to save you."

Ji Eun-Ju's heart sank at his last words, and she had an emotional breakdown.

Lee Shin and the challengers could no longer tell how many days they had been in the Demon Realm. Even Lee Shin had begun to feel mentally exhausted.

"Stay here for a moment. I'll look around the area for a bit and come back," Lee Shin said.

After giving them a short break, Lee Shin moved far away and searched for enemies. The number of soldiers he had defeated so far easily surpassed three digits. With this many killed already, it would be difficult for the enemies to break through the Demon Realm and reach Merteng.

"Man... when will this Demon Realm end?" Kogo muttered.

As soon as Lee Shin left the group, Kogo started walking around, feeling frustrated.

“Master! Don’t just wander off like that! You have no energy to waste,” Kanoko shouted, looking at Kogo.

"It's all right. Ahn Jin is watching over m—Agh!" Kogo gasped abruptly.

A tree stem had abruptly shot out from the ground, grabbed Kogo’s foot, and thrown him into a tunnel behind the tree.

"Darn it!" Ahn Jin shouted.

Ahn Jin quickly swung his fist and cut the tree stem, but Kogo was already airborne and wailing like a banshee.

"Help meeee!" Kogo screamed.

Kogo’s voice was getting further and further away, so Ahn Jin kicked the ground and rushed toward him.

"Gosh! I knew he would get in trouble,” Kanoko muttered as she quickly followed Ahn Jin.

Kogo and Ahn Jin entered the tunnel, which seemed terrifyingly deep, and then its entrance was blocked, and a demonic wood beast emerged to guard it. May had followed Kanoko here and used magic to burn the wooden demonic beast.

Kanoko then used Mana Detection over the area where the tunnel was located.

"I don't feel their mana," Kanoko muttered with a serious expression.

Moving portals occasionally appeared in the Demon Realm, and Kanoko had no way of knowing their destination. She couldn’t follow them into the tunnel, and she couldn’t track them to provide support.

"Don't worry too much; Ahn Jin followed him," May said.

"But..." Kanoko muttered.

"Tsk, I can't believe he got trapped now of all time," May muttered.

May was honestly only concerned about hearing his master's complaints rather than Kogo's safety.

"Ahn Jin prattles so much about his training, but he couldn't even protect one idiot," Warrie grumbled, seeming annoyed.

"If Mr. Lee Shin returns now, he'll surely scold them later," Kohei muttered.

"Kohei, aren't you worried?" Kanoko asked.

"What's there to worry about? Ahn Jin is there with him, and our master is not weak enough to get defeated in a place like this," said Kohei.

"But his powers are sealed now," Kanoko explained to Kohei, thinking about Kogo.

"Um... he'll figure something out," Kohei said.

Kanoko looked worriedly at Kohei, wondering if Kohei had developed insensitivity to safety. After a while, Lee Shin returned, and when he noticed the gloomy atmosphere surrounding the group, he sighed.

"I had a feeling, and I guess it turned out to be true," Lee Shin muttered.

His connection with Ahn Jin had suddenly weakened, so Lee Shin had expected that Ahn Jin had fallen into a trap. Since it was unlikely that Ahn Jin was alone, it had been easy to deduce that he had tried to save Kogo from some kind of danger.

"Are we going to go find them?" Kanoko asked Lee Shin.

"Of course," Lee Shin replied.

As Lee Shin's party began to move, Kogo and Ahn Jin prepared to fight the demons surrounding them. After entering the tunnel, they had seemingly fallen to the ground from a cliff.

If Ahn Jin had not caught Kogo, Kogo might have fallen off the cliff, broken his neck, and died. Thinking about that, Kogo broke out in a cold sweat.

"Damn it... where are we?" Kogo seemed scared.

"Didn't I tell you to be cautious?" Ahn Jin seemed annoyed.

"I was frustrated, that's why! Damn it, can you even handle all of this?" Kogo asked Ahn Jin.

Kogo looked at the demons surrounding him. There were demonic beasts that looked like birds, snakes, gnats, monkeys, and bears. These growling demons seemed ready to fight each other to get to their prey first.

Even if Ahn Jin could capture them all alone, it might be difficult for him to protect Kogo without getting hurt. Kogo gulped at this thought.

"Don't worry," said Ahn Jin, looking at Kogo.

Ahn Jin's calm voice reassured Kogo's anxious heart. From Ahn Jin's thick fingers, black mana began to surge.

[Psychic Energy Blast Wave]

Swish—!

The attack sounded like a sonic wave and flew straight like an arrow. It easily swept away the monsters hiding in the black mist, leaving behind an echo.

Kieekk!

Kaaaah!

The demonic beasts rushed toward Kogo and Ahn Jin, roaring. Ahn Jin stepped on a snake-like demonic beast slithering amok on the ground to kill it and covered his legs with mana. It was his newly developed admirable performance in the field of thunder influenced by Lee Shin.

[Thunderbolt Kick]

Ahn Jin kicked the ground, creating a web of lightning that spread in all directions, and jumped into the midst of the demonic beasts.

Pizz—!

Thunder boomed every time Ahn Jin kicked, and the thunderbolt evaporated the surrounding demonic beasts.

"Wow, this is amazing," Kogo muttered.

As if watching an incredible magic trick, Kogo exclaimed in admiration. Not before long, the thunderbolts had dealt with all the demonic beasts around them.

Clap, clap, clap!

Kogo clapped in admiration as Ahn Jin approached him after finishing the fight.

"Now that it's over, let's wait here," said Ahn Jin.

"Wait, you want us to stay here?" Kogo asked Ahn Jin.

"We don't know where the master will come from, but since I've used my mana here, the master will likely come here," Ahn Jin explained.

"Well... I see. Anyway, thanks," Kogo said.

The forest had turned into ash. Kogo hugged himself and shuddered as he looked at the corpses of the demonic beasts strewn around them.

Kogo finally realized how strong Ahn Jin was after seeing his true abilities. The wizard, Lee Shin, was unbelievably strong, but his subordinates were also powerful.

‘Aren't their skills beyond comprehension?’

After seeing Ahn Jin's strength, Kogo gave up on using their desperate situation as an excuse to get out of the cuffs.

"When will I get free of these damn handcuffs?" Kogo muttered.

"Shh. Someone's coming," said Ahn Jin.

"Huh? Won't that be Lee Shin?" Kogo asked Ahn Jin.

"No, it's not the master," Ahn Jin replied.

Thump thump thump thump—

They heard a series of footsteps, and since demonic beasts couldn't make that sound, the newcomers had to be human. And if it was not Lee Shin's party, it had to be enemies.

"Damn it," Ahn Jin muttered.

Their tension skyrocketed. Even by rough estimate, it sounded like a party of ten. Kogo clenched his teeth.

"What is that? Is he a necromancer?" a challenger from that party asked, looking at Ahn Jin.

"No, look over there. That one is wearing handcuffs," said another challenger, pointing at Kogo.

"Huh? Oh wait..."

"Then what about that Skeleton?"

"Is the Skeleton guarding that guy? No, wait!" Another challenger from the group felt that something was odd, so they narrowed their eyes and stared at Kogo.

"Isn't he Inyuu Kogo?" said the challenger, who had been staring at Kogo.

"What, really?"

"Shouldn't he be in some prison in Merteng? Why would he be here?"

"No, wait... I've heard that Lee Shin has climbed up. Did Kogo betray them and join Lee Shin or something?"

"But then why is he wearing handcuffs?"

“Maybe he hasn't gained Lee Shin's trust yet?”

These challengers had never thought that they would find Inyuu Kogo here, so conflicting opinions arose among them. Watching their reaction, Kogo tried to think on his feet.

‘It seems like they know Lee Shin has come up. Does that mean they haven't been in the Demon Realm for that long?’?

By now, through the upper floor community, Lee Shin's information should have reached other countries. Kogo thought that the challengers on the twentieth floor must have come up to the twenty-first floor and informed others that Lee Shin was on the twenty-first floor now.

"Wait! I-I escaped. Lee Shin dragged me here against my will, and I barely got away!" Kogo shouted.

"What? Lee Shin is here? Then is that Skeleton Lee Shin's subordinate?"

"Yes, as you can see, his subordinate used up all his strength in the fight with the demonic beasts earlier, so he can't move," said Kogo.

Kogo glanced at Ahn Jin, hoping that Ahn Jin understood what he meant.

‘If you're smart, you would stay quiet and follow my lead.’

Fortunately, Ahn Jin understood Kogo's plan and sat still as if he were dead.

"If he's right and Lee Shin is here, we must go back and tell everyone."

"Well... that's true. But, what about Inyuu Kogo?"

"We'll take him with us. We can negotiate using him when talking to Lantan."

Kogo's expression stiffened after hearing that.

‘I can't let them take me like this.’

Even if Kogo were transferred to Tetir, he would remain captive. Moreover, Kogo felt that being by Lee Shin's side was more advantageous than being in Tetir.

"Wait a minute! Why don't we defeat Lee Shin instead of going like this? That guy is exhausted right now," Kogo suggested.

"Defeat Lee Shin?" asked another challenger, seemingly seeking clarification.

"Yeah, Lee Shin is weaker than you think. He only has an Orange Pattern right now. He actually ran like a mouse earlier after encountering a few challengers with Blue Patterns," Kogo said, desperately lying to them.

‘Please be fooled.’

However, unlike what Kogo had hoped for, the challengers began frowning.

"Are you telling us to believe that?" one of the challengers asked.

"What a bastard! People have told me that Lee Shin caught Abaim Monstre on the 20th floor. And you dare say he ran away from a few Blue Pattern guys?" another challenger said.

“Wow, this Inyuu Kogo guy is already a Korean dog,” another challenger muttered.

"Well... isn't he in this state because he couldn't perform a single mission properly?"

"His reputation was all a lie."

"I should have taken that mission back then."

"What did you say?" Kogo was furious.

Kogo's strategy of taking these challengers to Lee Shin had failed, but that seemed inconsequential to him now. How dare a few Orange and Yellow Pattern challengers scoff at him. They used to fear him a few months ago; now, they were questioning his prowess. His pride was hurt.

"Why do you care? You worthless bastard," said a challenger, glaring at Kogo.

Woong— Bang!

"Kuh... uhk..." Kogo gasped.

The challenger swiftly kicked Kogo's stomach. Kogo could not breathe properly and looked at them with a red face.

'Fuck... Only if it weren't for these handcuffs...!'

Kogo's jaw muscles tightened as he gritted his teeth hard and clenched his fists. Suddenly, Kogo felt something hard in his fist. Ahn Jin had stood up and grabbed Kogo's fist.

"Give me your hand," said Ahn Jin.

"What?" Kogo was surprised.

Thunk! Thunk! Thud!

Ahn Jin broke the handcuffs around Kogo's hands and feet, and they fell to the ground.

Wooong—

Kogo instantly felt his mana activating. The mana wave flowing in Kogo awoke something that had been dormant for the past few months.

"Go ahead and do your best until the master arrives," said Ahn Jin.

Whoosh!

Flames materialized on his palms and grew stronger as they flew around, setting fire to the surrounding grass and trees.

[Moving Flame]

The challengers of Tetir were bewildered by the flames that moved like sentient beings.

"Who did you call worthless?" Inyuu Kogo smirked.